

News Release

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Water Enhancement 'Could Create 4,000 New Jobs in Canterbury'

Up to 4,000 jobs could be created, worth \$600 million per annum to the Canterbury region, if an ambitious plan to bring water to farms between the Waimakariri and Rakaia rivers goes ahead.

According to scoping work carried out for the Christchurch City and Selwyn District Councils by Central Plains Water, a scheme providing water for irrigation to 84,000 hectares on the upper Canterbury Plains would ultimately create jobs on-farm, in support work and in processing industries sufficient to substantially grow the whole Canterbury economy.

Chairman of Central Plains Water Doug Marsh said the proposals represent a unique opportunity to make a mark on the history of the region.

"Water is the most vital resource and we have plenty of it in Canterbury – just not always in the right place at the right time to suit growing conditions for primary producers. If a community water enhancement scheme goes ahead, it will help to put that right. If we heed the advice we have received from various environmental, cultural and river interest experts, we will also ensure that a development is sustainable and enhances natural and recreational values as well as economic ones," he said.

Engineering feasibility work for the project has focused on where water might be sourced and where a likely demand might exist for irrigation, said Mr Marsh.

"We have identified an area of 84,000 hectares bounded by the foothills, the two rivers and a line running approximately from Rakaia to Aylesbury. Calculations show that we should be able to provide water for irrigation to this area at a cost to farmers of less than \$200 per hectare per annum. This is considerably less than it costs at present to irrigate in this area from wells.

“If it is taken during peak flows, water from Lake Coleridge, the Rakaia, the Waimakariri or a combination of the three could provide water to this area without exceeding statutory water consent restrictions. However, if this is done it will require a storage lake capable of holding 250 million cubic metres – which is a large body of water.

“Our feasibility work has identified a number of possible sites to store water - either in Wairiri Valley in the foothills south of Glentunnel, in the upper reaches of the Selwyn River or using Lake Coleridge itself. If the feasibility work proceeds, the most promising of these options will be developed into a detailed construction plan and resource consent will be sought,” said Mr Marsh.

Central Plains Water was set up by the two Councils in March and will report its findings to a joint meeting of City and Selwyn Councillors on Monday 18 December. The Councils will decide whether or not the project should proceed to a full feasibility study.

If the Councils accept the recommendations made by Central Plains Water the detailed feasibility work will be undertaken next year. Budgets for completion of the feasibility and planning to the resource consent stage are set at \$1.3 million. The two Councils have each granted \$150,000 to initiate the project, Agmardt has granted \$350,000 and the remaining funds to complete the feasibility project are expected to be confirmed early next year, according to Mr Marsh.

He said initial estimates for final construction of a scheme are set at \$100 million, with a best guess for completion no sooner than five years.

An extensive community consultation programme is being carried out by Central Plains Water to meet with farmers, tangata whenua, environmental interests, anglers and others and determine the issues and features that should be embodied in a water enhancement project. This will continue if the feasibility work goes ahead.

Further Information
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